

Naval Ordnance Test Station Inyokern, Dispensary
(Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake, Building 3)
Main Site, Lauritsen Road at McIntyre Street
Ridgecrest Vicinity
Kern County
California

HABS
CAL
15-RIDG.V,
1A-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

**Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Western Region
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California 94107**

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NAVAL ORDNANCE TEST STATION INYOKERN
(Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake)
Dispensary (Building 3)

HABS
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1A-

HABS No. CA-2703-A

Location: Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake
Lauritsen Road at McIntyre Street

USGS Ridgcrest North Quadrangle (7.5')
UTM Coordinates: 11 E440900 N3945900

Present Owner: Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake
China Lake, CA 93555-6100

Present Use: Administrative / Parachute Facility

Last Use: Computer Center and Office Building

Significance: The Dispensary (Building 3) is significant as an example at Naval Air Weapons Station (NAWS) China Lake of the original International Style design for the facility. The building embodies the character-defining architectural elements originally intended for all the major buildings at the facility. Designed and built in 1944, Building 3 is also a distinguished example of World War II-era military design. The vast majority of military construction during World War II was "temporary" in nature and developed from standardized plans from the Corps of Engineers or Bureau of Yards and Docks. The Naval Ordnance Test Station (NOTS) station was one of a very small number of permanent stations planned and built during the war. It is therefore also one of a few stations to represent the architectural fashions and sensibilities of that era. The radial wing plan and the International Style of the original station is highly unusual if not unique among American military buildings.

DESCRIPTION

Building 3 is a wood frame building, surfaced in stucco, built at this site in 1944 as part of the first wave of construction at the Naval Ordnance Testing Station (NOTS). The building comprises five wings, identified as Wings A-E, linked by a narrow hallway. The wings are of different lengths: Wing A is 242' long, Wing B 110', and Wings D and E 222' long. Each wing is 28' wide. The hallway that connects these wings is 360' long and about 15' wide. The most distinctive aspect of the building is that the hallway is curved with a very wide radius. The curve to the hallway causes the wings to fan out, like the spokes in a wheel. The hallway aligns near the south end of Wing A, at the center of Wing B, and near the north end of Wings C, D, and E, creating offsets along the north and south walls.

The primary entrance to the building is in Wing A, at the eastern end of the building. The entrance is defined by a flared concrete canopy, with columns faced in natural stone. This flared canopy design was included in all of the most prominent buildings at NOTS, including Building 1, the administration building, and Building 5, the Michelson laboratory. Native stone was used to face many of the more prominent buildings at NOTS, including this building and Building 20, the base theater. Entry is gained through an original door, with glass block sidelights. The central entry is flanked by banks of tall two-over-two double-hung wooden sash. This two-over-two sash is common throughout the building; virtually all of the windows in Building 3 are original.

The south wall of Building 3 is dominated by the radiating pattern of the five major wings. At this elevation, Wing A is very short (45'), Wing B about twice as long, while Wings C, D, and E (each about 27' long), a 45' stem of Wing B, and a very long segment of Wing A (242'). The fenestration and door patterns are similar to those elsewhere on the building and all windows and doors appear to be original.

Building 3 retains a very high degree of architectural integrity and is largely unmodified. The only notable alterations are a small addition at the northwest corner, an extension of Wing B on the north side, and the installation of a handicapped access ramp at the entry canopy. The building embodies the best of the character-defining architectural elements originally intended for all the major buildings at the facility and is a distinguished example of World War II-era military design.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The facility now called NAWS China Lake was established in 1943-44 as the Naval Ordnance Test Station (NOTS) Inyokern. The need for this facility dates to the 1940 decision by the U. S. military to fund weapons research through a consortium of high-technology universities, with money being allocated through the Office of Scientific Research and Development (OSRD). In California, the majority of research and

development (R&D) and test and evaluation (T&E) contracts were awarded to the University of California and the California Institute of Technology (Cal Tech).

The Navy worked most closely with Cal Tech, awarding contracts for a large array of weapon systems. The Navy focused most closely, however, on two types of weapons: air-launched torpedoes and rockets for ships and aircraft. Cal Tech had the major contract for both types of work and attempted to complete this work from offices and laboratories in Pasadena. By 1943, however, it became clear that the work was far too dangerous to continue in that city, forcing the Navy to look elsewhere for open land for both R&D and T&E work. In late 1943, the Navy laid claim to hundreds of thousands of acres of the Mojave Desert to establish NOTS. Thus, although NOTS was a Navy station, it existed chiefly to support the work of Cal Tech. After V-J Day, the Cal Tech contract was canceled and the facility was occupied by Navy employees, military as well as civilian.

During World War II, the Navy was forced to build a new city in the desert to accommodate thousands of Cal Tech scientists, Federal civilian workers, and uniformed Navy personnel. Although first priority was given to construction of scientific laboratories and test facilities, the Navy could not avoid building every conceivable type of support building, including residential, commercial, recreational, and medical buildings. The unusual aspect of construction at NOTS was the fact that it was built to permanent standards. The Navy anticipated that it would need to continue its research and testing of rockets and missiles, even after the war had been finished. With an eye toward future use, the major buildings at NOTS were built to peacetime standards, even while most military construction elsewhere was completed to temporary, wartime standards.

Building 3 can best be understood as a key support building for the R&D and T&E facility. It was the first and for many years the only hospital in the area. In time, the community of Ridgecrest would be constructed by private developers and fitted with many of the services previously provided on-base, including hospital services. For the first decade, however, Building 3 was the only hospital in the vicinity. It was both a military and civilian facility. Because the majority of residents at NOTS were civilians, it likely received far more civilian than uniformed patients.

The building also typifies the design standards at NOTS which, as noted, are highly unusual in that they were permanent buildings constructed during World War II. As noted, the decision to establish NOTS was made in late 1943. By 1944, about half of the projected station had been designed and built.

Building 3 was constructed in 1944 and served as the dispensary (hospital/clinic) for NAWS China Lake until 1978. At that time, the building was converted for high-security research; as a result the building is now surrounded by a tall security fence. More recently, the secure operations have been relocated to other buildings and remaining uses

are no longer classified. Building 3 is the best example at NAWS China Lake of the original International Style design for the facility. It embodies the best of the character-defining architectural elements originally intended for all the major buildings at the facility and is a distinguished example of World War II-era military design.

The frantic pace of design and construction forced all responsible parties to develop, refine, and often discard concepts for how the station should be put together. Responsibility for the design of NOTS fell to three parties: the Bureau of Ordnance, which had command over the facility; the Bureau of Yards and Docks, the design and construction branch of the Navy; and the firm of Stafford-Davies-Gogerty, a private architectural-engineering consultant hired by the Navy to develop plans for the station. The California Institute of Technology (Cal Tech) also played a large role in the design of the technical buildings, particularly the laboratories and test facilities.

It appears, however, that Stafford-Davies-Gogerty was chiefly responsible for attempting to develop an architectural program for the station. The architect for the group was Henry L. Gogerty, a prolific designer who was active until his death in 1990 at the age of 96. Born in Iowa, Gogerty arrived in Los Angeles in 1923. Early in his career, Gogerty designed commercial buildings, most in the Spanish Colonial or Streamline Moderne styles popular in Los Angeles during the 1920s and 1930s. By the late 1930s, however, he began to specialize in large institutional buildings and to design in the International Style, emerging as a fashionable design in Los Angeles during the late 1930s. Among his major buildings were an airport in Glendale, an airport in Palm Desert, and most of the industrial complex of Hughes Aircraft, including the wooden building in which the "Spruce Goose" was assembled. His obituary highlighted as his major post-war achievements the design of more than 350 schools in Southern California, dozens of industrial projects, and many shopping centers. Given his background, Gogerty was an excellent choice by the Bureau of yards and Docks to lay out NOTS, which included many industrial buildings as well as an airfield.

Early in the planning for the station, Gogerty attempted to lay out an architectural program that would help unify the appearance of the buildings of the "village," the administrative-research-residential core of the station now called the Main Site. The elements of his plan can still be seen in scattered examples, although the station as a whole has been so extensively modified as to lack the unity he intended. The character is seen most clearly in the core administrative and research area, defined by Building 1 (the headquarters building). Building 5 (the main laboratory), and Building 3, the subject dispensary building. The character can also be read in Building 20, the station theater. The most easily recognizable characteristic is a flared concrete entry porch and the use of native stone.

One design element developed in early 1943 included a spoked plan for buildings 1, 3, and 5, in which a curved central hallway would link radiating wings. Old plans indicate that Gogerty had intended for all three buildings to use this plan, which resembles the

placement of the spokes of a wheel. For various reasons, the plan was discarded for both Building 1 and 5; these were redesigned with a straight but narrow central hallway, linking with long projecting wings.

Building 3, however, was built to the original radiating wing plan, the only building at the station to retain that plan. It was also fitted with other character-defining elements of Gogerty's plan for the station: a flaring concrete canopy at the entry, native stone at the canopy, a low-hipped roof (most buildings from the original station were either flat-roofed or low hipped roof), thick stucco over wood frame (only a few buildings at the original station were built of reinforced concrete; most were stucco over frame); double hung-wooden windows; sidelights at the main entry doors; and other elements.

Building 3 is significant as a distinguished example of World War II-era military design. The vast majority of military construction during World War II was "temporary" in nature and developed from standardized plans from the Corps of Engineers or Bureau of Yards and Docks. The NOTS station was one of a very small number of permanent stations planned and built during the war. It is therefore also one of a few stations to represent the architectural fashions and sensibilities of that era. The radial wing plan and the International Style of the original station is highly unusual if not unique among American military buildings.

SOURCES

"Historic Context for Evaluating the National Register Eligibility of World War II-era and Cold War-era Buildings and Structures at Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake," prepared by JRP Historical Consulting Services, 1996.

"Dispensary, Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake, Kern County, California," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, prepared by JRP Historical Consulting Services, 1997.

PROJECT INFORMATION

The action causing this documentation to be undertaken is the planned demolition of the Dispensary (Building 3) at Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake. This building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1997. This documentation is a requirement of the MOA among the Navy, SHPO and ACHP reached in accordance with the regulation for the "Protection of Historic Properties," (36 CFR Part 800) implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

